

PADDLE
★ ANTRIM ★



| 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Deana Jerdee
Executive Director

Board of Directors

Mindy Theis

President

Sue Haadsma-Svensson

Vice President & Treasurer

Gary Buczkowski

Steve Sutton

Haley Breniser

Gary Chenoweth

Rich Hannan

Staff

Deana Jerdee

Executive Director

Ellie Kirkpatrick

Outreach Manager



LETTER FROM DEANA

Greetings -

This past year has been a powerful reminder of what is possible when people come together around a shared love for our waterways. Thanks to our supporters, volunteers, partners and champions, Paddle Antrim continues to grow its impact - connecting more people to the Chain of Lakes Water Trail while deepening our commitment to stewardship, accessibility, and community.

In 2025, we enhanced infrastructure and our programs reached new audiences, from first-time paddlers to longtime advocates, each one building a stronger connection to these incredible natural resources. At the same time, we continued to protect the health of our waterways—because access and stewardship must go hand in hand.

At the core of everything we do is a simple belief: time spent on the water inspires connection—to nature, to one another, and to the responsibility of caring for these places. We witness this every day, from someone’s very first paddle to the shared energy of our festival, to the quiet, personal moments found on the water trail. These experiences don’t happen on their own. They are made possible by volunteers, partners, and supporters like you, whose commitment helps us broaden access, prioritize safety, and protect the waterways we all cherish.

As we look ahead, we are energized by the opportunities before us. We will continue building connections—between people and water, communities and conservation, and today’s efforts and tomorrow’s impact. Together, we are creating a future where everyone can experience the joy and belonging that comes from time spent on the water.

With gratitude,

Deana Jerdee

THE PEOPLE OF PADDLE ANTRIM: A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

HONORING FOUNDING LEADERS

Every great venture begins with a belief before there is proof. For Paddle Antrim, that belief was personified by Jim Huckle and Megan Motil. In 2025, we were proud to honor both with the **Headwaters Award**—a tribute to those who represent the "source" of our mission.

The Architect of Growth: After 10 incredible years of service, founding board member **Megan Motil** stepped down in 2025. Megan didn't just hold a seat; she built the table. Serving as Vice President, President, and Treasurer, she "connected the dots" for our organization, turning a startup dream into a thriving nonprofit and pillar of the Northern Michigan outdoor recreation community.

The Catalyst of Possibility: **Jim Huckle**, along with his wife Diana, saw the potential of Paddle Antrim when it was just an idea. As entrepreneurs, the Huckles understood the courage it takes to start something new. Their early and steadfast financial support provided the forward motion that allowed Paddle Antrim to launch. Jim and Diana's faith in our mission gave us the foundation to grow from a local dream into a State Designated Pure Michigan Water Trail.



Jim Huckle & Megan Motil

LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

As Megan and Jim built our foundation, Harry Burkholder helped us navigate some of our most transformative years. Serving from 2020 to 2026, Harry brought a "steady hand" to the helm. His deep expertise—from his time at the Traverse City DDA to his work with LIAA—ensured that Paddle Antrim didn't just grow; it grew with excellence. Harry's visionary voice helped make our waterways more accessible and our organization more professional.

While these veteran leaders move on to new adventures, they leave the organization in the experienced hands of Executive Director Deana Jerdee (11 years) and Outreach Manager Ellie Kirkpatrick (6 years). This continuity is bolstered by new board members Haley Breniser, Steve Sutton, Gary Chenoweth, and Rich Hannan, who bring expertise in nonprofit leadership, conservation, and public policy. Learn more about each of our new board members at www.paddleantrim.com/about-paddle-antrim/board-and-staff.

THE POWER OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

If our staff steers the ship, our volunteers are the paddles that move us forward. This is best illustrated in the story of Craig and Gillian von Seeger. Six years ago, after retiring to Bellaire, they joined a Water Steward class to learn about their new home. That single class sparked a journey from students to stewards. Today, Craig and Gillian both serve on the Festival Planning Committee and on the ground at the Festival in various ways, ensuring its success. They also contribute their various talents to help with other organizational needs such as photography and organization of mailings. Their story reflects the heart of our volunteer core: people who show up to protect our waterways for the next generation.



BOARD AND STAFF IMPACT

- 17 Years of combined staff leadership
- 16 Years of collective board service from our departing members
- 4 New leaders joined the board to guide our future growth



VOLUNTEER IMPACT

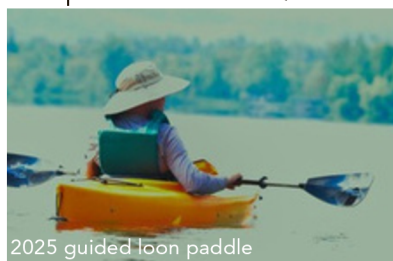
- 1,946 Volunteer hours given 2025
- \$64,218 Value of donated volunteer hours
- 120+ Active volunteers

CONNECTING PADDLERS TO OUR WATERWAYS

PADDLING CLASSES

Our kayaking classes teach kids and adults how to maneuver their boats more effectively and how to mitigate risk and prepare to help others. This is all taught through play, exploration and collaboration. But the true impact of our class isn't the skills learned, it is the transformational moments that connect paddlers to each other and the water.

During a kayaking class, one participant laughed when told she would practice a "wet exit," calling the instructors "crazy." Yet, with the instructor's support, she flipped her boat and successfully climbed back in. The pride on her face as she surfaced proved that our classes don't just teach rescue maneuvers; they empower people try new things and gain confidence and empowerment on the water. We look forward to more moments of empowerment in our 2026 kayaking and paddle boarding classes! Check out our 2026 class schedule at www.paddleantrim.com/classes.



2025 guided loon paddle



GUIDED LOON PADDLE

This year, we launched a new on-water event format: the Guided Point-to-Point Paddle. Our inaugural trip took 20 paddlers across the glass-like surface of Intermediate Lake on a beautiful July morning to quietly observe loon families on the lake. This paddle was in partnership with the Intermediate Lake Association's loon enthusiasts.

Participants drifted quietly to observe two loon families, hearing their haunting call and learning firsthand about the delicate balance of our ecosystem.

By utilizing our own Paddle Antrim fleet of kayaks (donated in 2024 by Rotary Camp Services) we ensured that gear was not a barrier. We provided the boats; the lake, loons, and beautiful weather provided the magic. We look forward to hosting this again on July 16, 2026! Learn more and sign up today at www.paddleantrim.com/events.

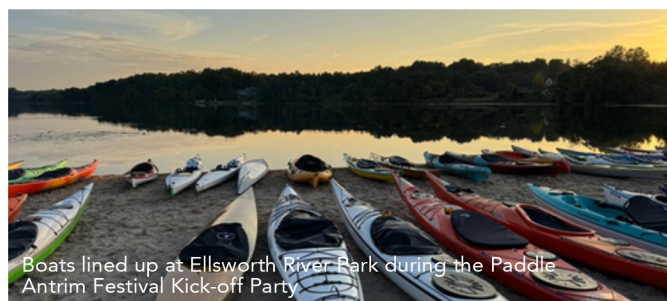
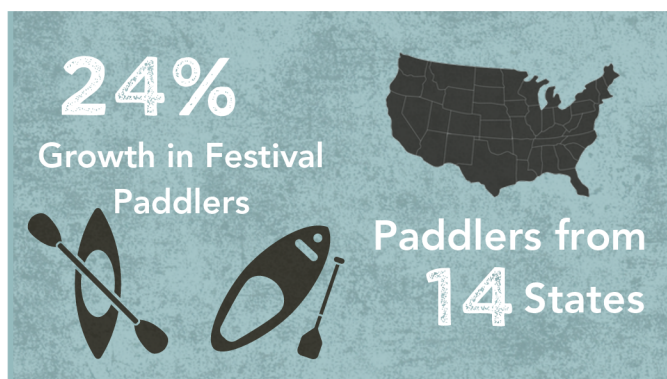
10TH ANNUAL PADDLE ANTRIM FESTIVAL

The true reach of the Paddle Antrim Festival is often found in the stories of those who travel from far beyond our local shores. This year, one participant's journey from New York City perfectly illustrated the radical hospitality of both the paddling family and our broader Northern Michigan community.

Arriving by bus from NYC and realizing that rideshares don't exist in rural Northern Michigan, this paddler could have been stranded. Instead, the paddling community stepped in, offering rides and gear so she could complete all 42 miles. She left not just having paddled the Chain of Lakes, but with a community that refused to let her paddle alone. This paddler story is remarkable, yet it is just one among many that have made the Festival a beloved tradition over the past 10 years.

As we move into our 11th year in 2026, we are excited to unveil new enhancements designed to make the Festival even more engaging and accessible:

- The Saturday–Sunday Shift: The main paddling days now fall on Saturday and Sunday, making it easier for more people to join the fun.
- Enhanced Ellsworth Kick-off: Friday, 2–7 PM, features an expanded Expo, boat demos, and our high-energy kick-off party.
- Safety First: Festival Prep classes on Friday afternoon focus on kayaking skills and rescue techniques, ensuring everyone feels confident on the water.



STEWARDSHIP: PROTECTING THE PRISTINE

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY IN PRACTICE: PREVENTION IS KEY

With more paddlers and greater geographic representation each year, preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species during the Paddle Antrim Festival is essential to living our mission. For the past several years, we have partnered with the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council to wash boats before they enter the water, helping ensure invasive species don't hitch a ride into the Chain of Lakes.

Along with promoting the Clean, Drain, Dry practice through signage, social media, newsletters, and paddler communications, we are proud to have installed the first permanent non-motorized boat wash station as part of the improvements at Elk Rapids Rotary Park (see the full update on page 5). This station will also serve as a template for future water trail access site improvements.



Boat wash station sign at Elk Rapids Rotary Park



Tip of the Mitt boat wash station at the 2025 Paddle Antrim Festival

RIPPLE EFFECT MINI GRANT PROGRAM

At Paddle Antrim, we believe that supporting projects that align with our mission ripples our impact further than we could ever do alone. Our Ripple Effect Mini Grant Program reinvests a portion of our class and event income back into the community, supporting local nonprofits and governmental units that share our goal of protecting the Chain of Lakes and surrounding watersheds.

In 2024, we were proud to award a grant to the Grass River Natural Area (GRNA) and the Health Department of Northwest Michigan (HDNW) for a project completed in late 2025: the Septic-Safe Native Plant Demonstration Garden.

Environmental health staff are frequently asked what can be safely planted over septic drain fields. Many homeowners use traditional turf grass, but the required watering and fertilizer can actually lead to system failure and nutrient runoff. This 1,000-square-foot "living classroom" at GRNA shows that native plants are the perfect, low-maintenance solution for protecting both home infrastructure and water quality.

By encouraging better land stewardship, GRNA and HDNW are helping to reduce pollutants entering our watershed. We encourage you to stop over at GRNA to view this in person and get ideas for your very own septic safe garden! Learn more about our Ripple Effect Mini Grant Program at www.paddleantrim.com/ripple-effect-mini-grants.

GRNA volunteers working on the Septic-Safe Native Plant Demonstration Garden



STEWARDSHIP IN ACTION

At Paddle Antrim, protecting our waterways is at the heart of what we do! Here's a snapshot of our stewardship efforts this year:

- ➔ **Signs for impact:** 81 panels at 36 Water Trail kiosks help paddlers learn to be responsible stewards.
- ➔ **Keeping boats clean:** Our boat wash station at the Paddle Antrim Festival scrubbed boats for 200+ participants, helping stop the spread of invasive species.
- ➔ **Learning on the water:** We hosted an aquatic invasive species (AIS) Community Paddle and a Train-the-Trainer AIS class to educate and empower volunteers to identify and report invasive species.
- ➔ **Community presence:** Shared AIS info at local community booths.
- ➔ **Spreading the word:** 14 social media posts and 2 press releases highlighted stewardship tips and initiatives.
- ➔ **Investing locally:** Up to \$3,000 annually supports stewardship projects led by local nonprofits and government partners.

THE CHAIN OF LAKE WATER TRAIL

MAINTAINING THE WATER TRAIL

Maintaining the water trail takes both time and resources. Paddle Antrim works closely with more than 20 nonprofit and governmental partners to care for and manage the trail. Each year, we raise funds to improve access sites while also building a reserve for future sign repairs and replacements.

Our dedicated volunteers play a vital role in this effort. More than 40 Water Trail Monitors regularly check access sites and signage, reporting on conditions throughout the season. In addition, our Stewards complete needed maintenance and improvements. In 2025 alone, volunteers contributed nearly 300 hours to monitoring and maintaining the water trail—representing almost \$10,000 in value based on Michigan’s volunteer rate.



THE WATER TRAIL: A PURE MICHIGAN LANDMARK

2025 marked a historic milestone: the Chain of Lakes is now officially a Pure Michigan Water Trail. This designation is more than just a title; it is a seal of approval from the state that our trail meets the highest standards for accessibility, signage, and environmental care. Paddle Antrim was proud to accept this designation at the Governor’s Conference on Tourism in Novi, Michigan in April 2025.



ELK RAPIDS ROTARY PARK SPOTLIGHT

This spring, we are proud to officially unveil the finished improvements at Elk Rapids Rotary Park on June 6, 2026. First identified as a priority by the Village in 2018, this project was finalized only after extensive public input.

- Environmental Stewardship: The first non-motorized boat washing station in Michigan and a native plant rain garden.
- Universal Access: Non-motorized, universally accessible launch, accessible plumbed restrooms with an adult changing station, accessible picnic tables.
- Safety & Infrastructure: A safer route to the boat channel, and redesigned parking with trailer turnaround.

The Chain of Lakes Water Trail has broad-based community support and provides safe, accessible recreational experiences for paddlers of all abilities. The trail provides substantial economic and social impacts while improving quality of life for residents and visitors to Antrim County. We are proud to designate the Chain of Lakes Water Trail as a Pure Michigan Trail.

Tim Novak, State Trails Coordinator for the Michigan DNR



ROUTES

- Beginner Level Route
- Intermediate Level Route
- Advanced Level Route

Lake Michigan



PADDLE NORTHERN MICHIGAN'S PRISTINE WATERS

The Chain of Lakes Water Trail, in northwest Michigan, is a paddler's paradise. This 100+ mile inland water trail is made up of 12 lakes and interconnected rivers, connecting people to the natural environment & vibrant communities.

**OVER 80
LAUNCHES
WITH ROUTES
RANGING FROM
3 MILES - 25 MILES**



To Plan your trip visit:
CHAINOFLAKESWATERTRAIL.ORG

Hosted By:



BECOME A SUSTAINER CIRCLE DONOR

STEADY SUPPORT, LASTING IMPACT

Our Sustainers Circle Donors contribute annual gifts of \$1,000 or more. This provides steady, reliable support for Paddle Antrim's work. These contributions make it possible to care for the water trail, respond to emerging needs, and continue protecting the Chain of Lakes for future generations.

Sustainers are a critical part of our community. Throughout the year, you'll receive updates and invitations to gatherings that offer a closer look at the impact of your support and the work happening on the water.

We support Paddle Antrim because of its focus on education, access, and hands-on care. Our waterways are part of our local identity and a key reason why we live here. When we donate, we feel like we're helping to ensure access as well as protecting and preserving an essential feature for future generations.

Jim & Gera Witte



Jim and Gera Witte (left) with Paul and Paula Moyer (right) at a donor appreciation event

BECOME A SUSTAINER TODAY!



May 2025 Sustainer Circle Donor preview of plans to improve Central Lake's Thurston Park



May 2025 Sustainer event at Mammoth Distilling in Central Lake

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 DONORS

\$5,000+

Anonymous
Tim and Teresa Cripsey
Dole Family Foundation
Frank G. and Gertrude Dunlap Fund
Frey Foundation
Grandparents of Ruby and Rigel
Grand Traverse Regional Community
Foundation O. Bishop and S. New Fund
Great Lakes Sports Commission
Jim and Diana Huckle Family Foundation
Matt and Deb Knudstrup
Matt and Katie McLeod
Tom and Debby McMullen
Short's Brewing Company
Karen Simpson
Sue Haadsma-Svensson & Kjell Svensson
The Sid & Esther Brown Family Foundation

\$1,000 - \$4,999

Anonymous (3)
Randy and Peg Asmus
Lynn and Chris Benich
Dianne Blamer
Blue Care Network of Michigan
BlueStone Futures
Gary and Lisa Buczkowski
Central Lake Lions
Linda and Daniel Cline
Robert and Mary Coco
Steve and Nancy Crosby
Michele Cudahy and Dave DeBack
Gary and Linda DeKock
Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation
George and Suzann Grazul
Phil and Carol Heles
Andy and Janet Hickman
Bryan and Tracey Holland
Meijer
Michigan State University
Steve and Shelley Misenheimer
Megan Motil
Michael and Laura Puzio
Quigel Family
Margo and John Rogers
Rosso Family Foundation
Deanna and George Seifried
Shanty Creek Resorts
Suncoast Financial Services Inc
The Place
Curtis Wilkerson and Anne Hitt
Woody Wright

\$1 - \$999

Anonymous (16)
Mark Andresky
Patrick Ankney
Mike and Bev Austin
Sandra Banducci
Jim and Deb Barber
Christine Barrera-Jones
Daniel and Heather Beem
Richard and Elizabeth Bellingham
Thomas Bennett
Joseph Berkowski and Ina Fernandez
Michael Bertram
Gregory and Linda Biehl
John Bigler
Bill and Laurie Blessed
Tim and Dana Boals
David and Laurie Boccia
Boccia Family Foundation
Tim and Christina Bohnhoff
Katie Bolt
Stacy Booth
Chris and Beth Booth
Scott Borchelt
Angie Bouma
Jeff Bozynski and Dawn Washio-Bozynski
Haley Breniser and Adam Brown
Patricia Budzynski
Jacquelyn Bullerman
Frazer Buntin
Harry and Andrea Burkholder
Campbell/Larch Charitable Fund
Barbara Cannon
Ken Cash
Roger and Lynne Caylor
Cellar 152
Gary and Mary Chenoweth
Jonathan Clark
Kelly Clark
Doug and Sue Coffin
Larry Cooley
Bruce Coppola
Chris and Merrie Corbett
Randy and Tina Creller
Richard Cross
Nicole Cullin
Bruce and Geneva Cummins
John and Patricia Curtis
Hans Dengler
Jonathan DeWys
Rick Domhoff
John & Shelly Donaldson
Shanna and Andy Draheim
DTE Energy Foundation
David and Kay Egert
EJ
Maddie Ek
Elk Rapids Marina

Rob and Kate Essenberg
Robert W. Evans
Tim and Ceri Faas
Christine & Tom Farmer
Fischer Insurance
James and Kari Fisher
Fluid Fun Canoe & Kayak
Steven and Sallie Foley
Dan Franczak
Steve and MaryJo Frimodt
Cherie Fuss
Shawna Gallagher
Rodney and Alice Gerard
Jerry Gillissen
Chris Good
Gourdie-Frasier, Inc
Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy
Grand Traverse Resort & Spa
Chris and Corey Grazul
Michael Grusenmeyer
Leslie Gutknecht
Michael J. and Mary Haley
Ken and Chris Hall
Scott and Debra Halpin
Eric Hancsak
Rich and Anna Hannan
Heather Harrod
Mr. and Mrs. David Hauser
David and Donna Heeres/Yettaw Cottages
Laura and Jay Hennessey
Chris and Laurie Herb
Alan PW Hewett
William C. and Heather L. Hewett
Don Hirt and Lisa Hall
Joan Hoekstra
Judith Holland
Linda Hoppel
Tom and Bette Irwin
Jacobs
Jay's Sporting Goods
Trevor and Deana Jerdee
Robert Jones
Dr. Marianne Jossens
Karen Keating and Paul Deardorff
King Orchards
Robert Kingon
Tim and Heather Klepp
Caly Koperski
A.J. La Course
Mic and Mary Lajiness
Lewis and Shelley Lake
Bruce LeFevre
Kate and Greg Lett
Lorie Long

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 DONORS

\$1 - \$999

Jeffrey and Paula Malak
Jennifer Manville
Jeff and Nancy Martin
Linda Mason
Thomas Mayer
Deb McCarty
Geary and Janice Mclaughlin
Rhonda Mejeur and Jeff Jackson
Robert Miller II
Brooke and Eric Minore
Frank and Jean Marie Moffa
Jordan Monarch
Bruce and Kristin Moore
Stuart Moyer
Barb Mullaly
Robert Mohr
Daniel Ogren
Mike and Stacy Ohmart
Oryana Food Cooperative, Inc
Jack Page
Rocky and Mary Paige
Kimberly Patterson
Pearl's New Orleans Kitchen
Natalie Perr
Michael and Kathryn Perrin
Gary and Lyn Petty
Bruce Pixler
Joseph Pixler
Stephen and Jane Plaisted
William D. and Pamela K. Poyfair
Sean Price
Dennis Prunkard
Ernie Quigel
Royce Ragland and Kenneth Bloem
Stewart and Shelly Rea
Jason Richardson
Phil and Joan Richardson
James Roble
Gail and Jim Rogers
Kimberly Rogers
Jeffrey and Leemor Rotberg
Gail Rubingh
Sandra A. Sauer-Stein
Patricia Savant
Mary Ann & Alan Schaefer
George and Darlene Schneller
Scott Sedam
Greg Sherman
Martin Shubitowski
Jim and Laura Shumate
Mindy Salzberg-Siegel and Harry Siegel
Philanthropic Fund
Lynn Spearing
Dr. Dennis and Michele Spillane
Spillway Lodges
Gary and Jane Stauffer
The Steelcase Foundation

Stoney Cabin Toys
Jannifer Stromberg
Steve and Cheryl Sutton
Larry and Marianne Talon
William Thauvette
Mindy Theis
Randy and Susan Thomas
Carol Thompson
Denny Thompson
Mark Thrasher
Paul & Linda Tyckoski
Katherine Vance-Schlappi
David Varga and Barb Van Pelt
Jack and Laurie Vermeulen
Village Market
Craig and Gillian von Seeger
Kent Walker
Andrew Waller
John and Louise Wenzel
Richard and Susan West
April and Mike Willbur
Gary and Sandra Williams
John and Angela Willis
Karl Wittbold
Philip and Shelley Zalewski
Lisa Zechmeister
Tom and Patti Zehner

IN-KIND DONORS

Cellar 152
JoAnne Thompson
Linda and Daniel Cline
Mammoth Distilling
Michigan Trails Magazine
Nora Luidens
Parallel Solutions
Pearl's New Orleans Kitchen
Pro Image Design
Ruthann's Gourmet Bakery
Short's Brewing Company

MATCHING GIFTS

Ally Financial Inc. Corporate Citizenship on behalf of Scott Borchelt
Altair on behalf of Eric Nelson
Google on behalf of Anonymous
Steelcase on behalf of Stephen and Jane Plaisted
Stryker on behalf of Shawna Gallagher
Timken Company Charitable Gift on behalf of Trevor and Deana Jerdee

IN MEMORIAM

Gifts made in memoriam of the bolded name.

Steve Cressy (Natalie Perr)
James Edwards (Anonymous)
Sharon C. Evans (Robert W. Evans)
Joel Holland (Judith Holland)
Lee Janssen (Larry and Marianne Talon)
Jeannie (Lisa Zechmeister)
Duane Wamsley (Stewart and Shelly)

HONORARIUM

Gifts made in honor of the bolded name.

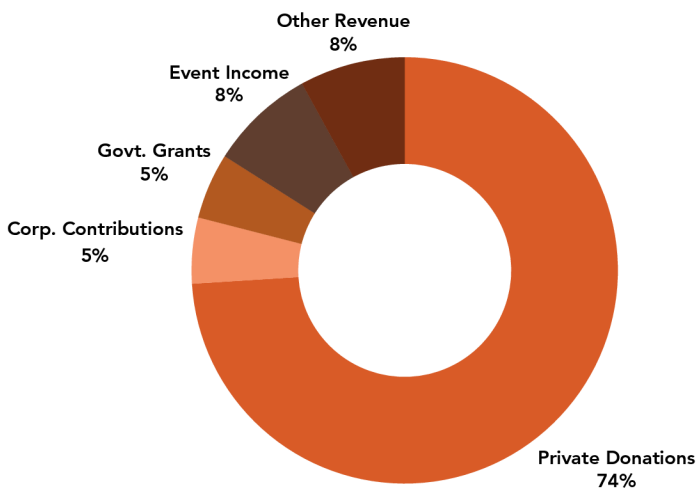
Dr. James L. and Prudence S. Barber
(Jim and Deb Barber)
Laurie Gray (Patricia Savant)
Jim and Diana Huckle (Megan Motil)
Deana Jerdee (David and Donna Heeres)
Steve & Shelley Misenheimer
(Anonymous)
Mike Coco & Megan Motil (Robert & Mary Coco)
Effie Powell (Gail Rubingh)

2025 FINANCIALS

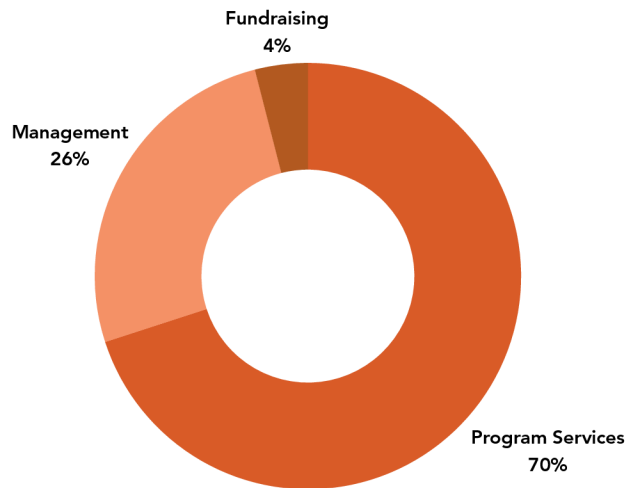
	Net Assets W/O Restrictions	Net Assets With Restrictions	Board Designated Funds	Total	Percent
Private Donations/Grants	\$74,813	\$206,544	\$11,000	\$292,357	74%
Corporate Contributions	\$19,873	-	-	\$19,873	5%
Governmental Grants	\$18,993	-	-	\$18,993	5%
Special Events Income	\$29,075	-	\$1,000	\$30,075	8%
In-kind/Donated	\$0	-	-	-	0%
Other Revenue (Includes Interest)	\$26,293	-	\$5,700	\$31,993	8%
Net Assets Released From Restriction	\$10,881	\$(7,241)	\$(3,640)		
Total Revenue	\$179,927	\$199,303	\$14,060	\$393,291	100%
Expenses					
Program Services	\$123,626			\$123,626	70%
Management	\$45,615			\$45,615	26%
Fundraising	\$6,700			\$6,700	4%
Total Expenses	\$175,941			\$175,941	100%
Change in Net Assets	\$3,986	\$199,303	\$14,060	\$217,350	
Net Assets Beginning of Year	\$155,353	\$155,166	\$171,269	\$481,788	
Net Assets (End of Year)	\$159,339	\$354,469	\$185,329	\$699,138	

Includes fixed assets and depreciation

REVENUES



EXPENSES





212 River St
PO BOX 323
Elk Rapids, MI 49629

231-498-2080
www.paddleantrim.com

Our mission is to protect our water resources by using paddle sports to connect people to our waterways. Through stewardship, education, improved water trail access, and promotion of our waterways we will increase water resource protection and enhance the economic vitality of the region.

Check out our events calendar!



SAVE-THE-DATE

SEASON KICK-OFF GATHERING

Saturday, June 6, 2026

Elk Rapids Rotary Park

PADDLE ANTRIM FESTIVAL

September 18 - 20, 2026

Ellsworth | Central Lake | Bellaire | Elk Rapids

